

Florida's Quality Parenting Initiative

Foster parents and other caregivers are vital partners in working with families on the pathway to permanency. The knowledge, skills, abilities, and emotional commitment to the children in their care contribute to faster, more lasting reunification as well as to their ability to work with case managers during other activities for achieving goals for the child and family.

Quality Parenting Initiative (QPI) is designed ensure that children are residing in an out-of-home care setting with a caregiver who:

- has the ability to care for the child,
- is willing to accept responsibility for providing care, and
- is willing and able to learn about and be respectful of the child's culture, religion and ethnicity, special physical or psychological needs, any circumstances unique to the child, and family relationships.

In addition, QPI is designed to promote the participation and engagement of foster care parents in the planning, case management, court proceedings, and delivery of services for those children who are residing in Florida's out-of-home care system, while working toward the child's long-term permanency and other goals.

The key elements of the QPI process are:

- To define the expectations of caregivers;
- To clearly articulate these expectations; and then
- To align the system so that those goals can become a reality.

The major successes of the project have been in systems change and improved relationships. Sites have also reported measurable improvement in outcomes such as:

- Reduced unplanned placement changes;
- Reduced use of group care;
- Reduced numbers of sibling separation; and
- More successful improvements in reunification.

QPI has been supported by the Eckerd Family Foundation, the Stuart Foundation, the Walter S. Johnson Foundation, the David B. Gold Foundation and the Annie E. Casey Foundation. Many areas of the state are actively promoting QPI not only for its improvements in caregiver skills, but also as a recruiting and retention tool; if a

caregiver is given training, tools, and respect as a partner in reaching goals for the child and family, they are more likely to remain engaged.